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LETTER DATED 10 FEBRUARY 1999 FROM THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I.
OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS
ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to forward herewith an address to the nation, dated 7 February 1999, by President Kabbah of Sierra Leone, in which the Government of Sierra Leone has consented to permit Foday Sankoh, leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel organization, to meet face to face with his colleagues of RUF at a suitable venue to be determined (see annex). The purpose of this move is to enable the rebels to consult with each other and thereafter to inform the Government as to how they intend to facilitate the peace process. This is further evidence of my Government's continued effort to encourage dialogue with the rebels, who have always acted mala fide, in order to resolve the senseless rebel war peacefully. The Security Council and the entire international community should now reinvigorate their efforts to assist the Government in bringing the war to an end.

It would be appreciated if this letter and its annex would be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Fode M. DABOR
Ambassador
Deputy Permanent Representative
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Annex

Address to the nation by President Kabbah of Sierra Leone
on 7 February 1999

It is now one month since the rebels entered our capital city and perpetrated the most heinous barbarity that has become the hallmark of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and its allies. Since then, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Military Observer Group (ECOMOG), the civil defence and other loyal forces have succeeded in driving them out of the city, even though, unfortunately, at a rather high cost to civilian lives and property. I cannot help but express once again my heartfelt sympathy to all those who lost family members or friends during this dark period in our history. I can now assure you, with absolute confidence, that ECOMOG, civil and other defence forces are in control of the situation.

Let me reassure you that while the security and protection of our citizens have been and continue to be our primary concern, especially during the past few weeks, the Government has never, ever abandoned the search for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. We know that there were those who were so traumatized by the rebel offensive that all they wanted was for us to surrender. There were others who thought that as soon as the invaders entered Freetown, the Government should have negotiated a settlement with them, at any cost. Let me say that if we had given up, at that time, the consequences would have been far worse for us all than what we experienced during those awful days of January 1999.

The rebels and their allies did not enter Freetown to negotiate or to engage in dialogue. They did not invade the city to merely threaten the population. On the contrary, they came with fire, grenades, guns and cutlasses. Their ultimate objective was to shoot their way to power. That is, to kill, maim, rape and amputate as many people as possible, to burn down as many private and public buildings as they possibly could and then to take over the seat of Government. You will agree with me that under those circumstances we made the right decision; first and foremost, to defend ourselves and to avert what could have been the total destruction of Sierra Leone as a civilized nation. At the same time, we also decided to leave the door open for any dialogue for long-term settlement.

Let me reiterate that I have always believed in dialogue with the RUF rebels. I have always been willing to talk. You will remember the strenuous efforts I put into the Abidjan peace talks in 1996, soon after I was elected President. You will also remember that even after the invasion, and at the risk of incurring the wrath of the overwhelming majority of Sierra Leoneans, I met Foday Sankoh, the leader of RUF, face to face. I even shook his hand. He hugged me. He cried and apologized for reneging on the Abidjan Peace Accord. We talked, and he and I agreed to a ceasefire. Well, as you know, other RUF members rejected it outright. We received conflicting signals from the RUF leadership and their allies. But we did not stop there. We then took yet another major step towards a peaceful settlement. Because the RUF leadership kept insisting that they had to talk to Foday Sankoh directly, and because the

foreign Ministers of Côte d'Ivoire and Togo had been mandated by ECOWAS to find out from the rebels exactly what they were fighting for, I allowed Sankoh to be taken to Conakry. There he met with the Foreign Ministers of those two countries and spoke to one of his leading supporters on the phone. Again, there were conflicting signals from RUF. So, all my efforts, made on your behalf, have not yielded the desired results.

At this point, I would like to take this opportunity to remind the rest of the world that RUF has engaged in armed conflict with the people and with every Government of Sierra Leone since 1991.

Having said this, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that there already exists, an international consensus on the terms that the rebels should fulfil for genuine dialogue, leading to lasting peace in our country. These are:

1. The rebels must recognize the legitimacy of my Government;
2. All armed attacks against the people of Sierra Leone must cease;
3. The rebels should present no preconditions for dialogue.

In the light of this consensus, and notwithstanding actions by the rebels to derail all my initiatives for achieving peace, I wish to state that my Government is prepared to continue its efforts for a dialogue - this time, using the Abidjan Peace Accord, which Foday Sankoh and I had signed, as a frame of reference.

I am sure most you are familiar with the contents of the Abidjan Peace Accord. But let me remind you that it makes provision, among other things, for RUF to transform itself into a political party; the reintegration of its members into Sierra Leonean society; the granting of amnesty to all RUF members; the disarmament and demobilization of all combatants; and the integration into the Sierra Leone armed forces of those who satisfy the recruiting criteria. I urge you all to examine these provisions dispassionately and with a long-term view of the nation as a whole. I invite all of you, particularly civil society groups, to begin consultations immediately and to try to build a national consensus on how the Government should conduct the peace process on the basis of the Abidjan Peace Accord.

Meanwhile, fellow citizens, I wish to inform you that, consistent with my continuing efforts to achieve durable peace in this country, I have been holding a series of consultations on this issue and can announce that I have agreed to allow Foday Sankoh to have face to face meeting with other members of RUF, at a suitable venue to be determined. The idea is to give them an opportunity to consult and let us know how they intend to facilitate the peace process. In other words, we want them, in their face to face meeting, to come up with a clear position, bearing in mind the international consensus on peace and the willingness of my Government to use the Abidjan Peace Accord as a frame of reference for a peaceful settlement. I hope that this time RUF will be sincere.

The search for lasting peace in Sierra Leone requires the concerted effort not only of Sierra Leoneans, but of their neighbours in the subregion and all peace-loving people throughout the world. I must therefore express my gratitude to our friends in the international community, particularly Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana, and to all those countries, including the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland which have supported us and have demonstrated their commitment to the pursuit of sustainable peace in Sierra Leone. I urge all well-meaning Sierra Leoneans to join in this quest for a lasting solution to conflict so that we can fight the real battle facing our country - the battle against poverty and underdevelopment.

We must all realize that there is a price for peace which we have to be prepared to pay. In order to eradicate poverty in our country, it is our collective responsibility to create an atmosphere of security, peace and stability, in that order.

Finally, fellow citizens let us all look to the future. Let us put aside our differences and work together for the future of our children and grandchildren. Let us not allow petty jealousies, rumours and squabbles to create a rift which evil forces can use to destroy us all. Let us all commit ourselves to seeking that which is for the common good. If individual and selfish desires are allowed to cloud our sense of unity and judgement, the outcome will be collective destruction. Let us always remember that the courage of our convictions will enable us to reach the desired goal, no matter how distant it may seem. The road may be long and rocky. The climb may be high and steep. But if we persevere, we shall overcome all the obstacles. And we shall get there sooner than we think.
